

# AN ASSESSMENT OF LIVELIHOOD AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN DELHI: A CASE STUDY OF NARELA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Tanya Chaudhary<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This paper analyses the conditions of work and livelihood options of industrial workers in the peripheral town of Narela. The industrial labour market in Narela thrives because of displaced workers from other parts of Delhi and migrant labourers from the adjoining north Indian states. The paper focuses on different dimensions of the working conditions of wage labourers in the manufacturing/industrial sector such as: physical environment, conditions of employment such as hours of work and holidays, wages, social security, grievance settlement procedure, legislative and institutional arrangement for ensuring minimum conditions of work in the industrial sector. The study mainly relies on primary data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). It highlights the ways in which workers built their work environment with strict labour control measures with the help of their spatial embeddedness and social ties and how this forms the vital aspect of modern industrial life.*

**Keywords:** Industrial Labour, Urbanisation, Livelihoods, Migration, Working conditions

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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D.Scholar in School of Development Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi

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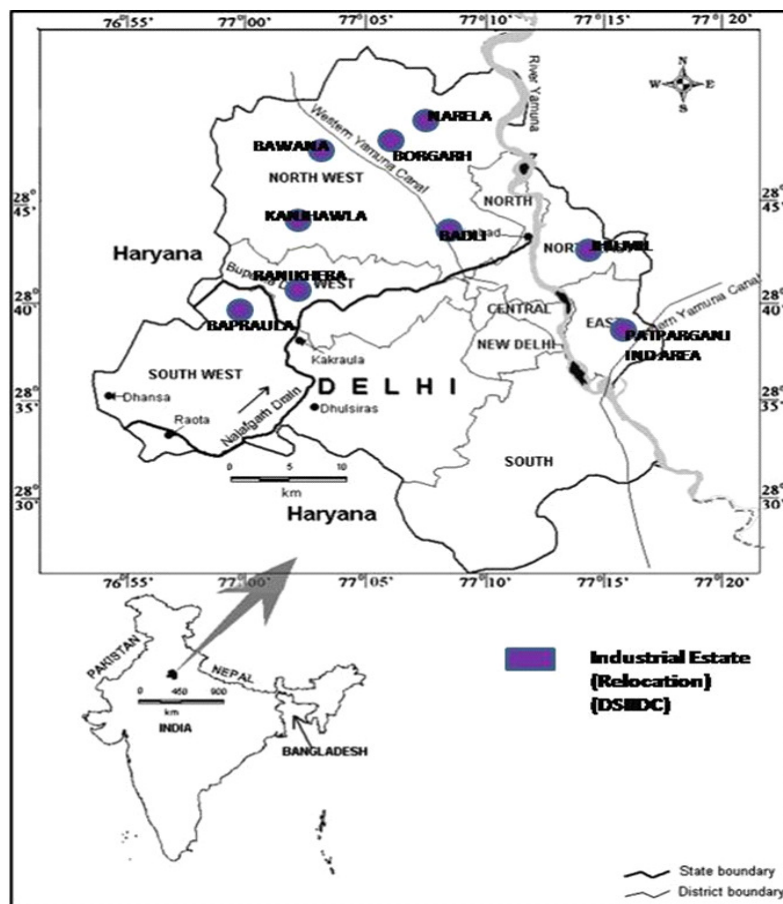
## 1. Introduction

Many peripheral villages/rural-urban fringes in metropolises of India are increasingly becoming subject to the impact of urban influences. The interaction between the rural and urban is very much evident in these places. The kind of urban impact which this paper deals with is that of industrial estate being introduced in a peripheral town having impact on town and nearby villages in terms of creating new labouring practices. The discourse of urbanisation in Delhi has largely been situated in the contested spaces which have been emerged around the issues of environmental concerns (Sharan, 2014; Bhaviskar, 2003); informality and enforcement of planning laws (Bhan, 2009, 2013; Roy, 2009; Benjamin, 1996) and legal citizenships and institutions (Ghertner, 2015). Although these issues are not straight-jacketed and are very much in connection with each other, they address the unevenness of neoliberalism. The idea of urban expansion and acquiring land in rural zones through eminent domain by Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has led to another issue of peripheralisation in Delhi which has caused large scale segmentation and differentiation (Kundu, 2012). Therefore, to promote planned, neat and ordered spatial development in Delhi, the state had taken measures to expel the working-class population to periphery. Planning exercises had somehow managed to overlook principles of inclusionary planning and dynamics of trans-local relations that labour establishes in city (Ramakrishnan, 2016; Menon & Bhan, 2008).

Witnessing the development policies of India, it is evident that the role of state had changed overtime from regulator to facilitator. The major initiative in the area of formal planning heralded with invitation to planners from Ford Foundation based in U.S. in collaboration with Town and Country Planning Organisation, to plan for the megacity which was severely struck by Jaundice epidemic. The Master Plan of Delhi, 1962 recognised the need for decentralisation and decongestion and therefore identified ring towns surrounding the core of the city. However, no major decongestion could take place until the prominent 1996 Supreme Court Judgment on relocation of non-conforming polluting industrial units from core of the city to peripheral towns of Narela, Bhorganh, Bawana, Khanjewal, Patparganj, Badli (Figure 1). This was preceded by the court case filed by M.C. Mehta for closure of non-conforming industrial units. It was a time when the environmental discourse for green and clean Delhi was at its height, and this claim was layered with exclusion of marginalised group from the city instead of addressing the dubious methods of governance and planning exercises. Environmental lobbying along with vision of global city by Delhi Master Plan (1980-2000) aimed towards decongesting Delhi. The initiatives taken for the same included greening around Central Delhi but no improvement in Quality of Life of peripheral pockets (Kundu, 2012). With the rise of middle class consciousness over its rights to claim for spaces in the city, DDA continued to exercise its power through law of eminent domain for land acquisition and dishing it out to capitalists and

profit-making developers. Delhi's Master Plan imagined a model city which was prosperous, hygienic, and orderly, but failed to recognise that this construction could only be realised through the labour of large number of the working poor for whom no provision had been made in the plans (Bhaviskar, 2003). Instead, the debates in urban planning are largely addressing the conversion of informal spaces of the city to formal through expulsion of poor. The large scale *basti*<sup>1</sup> demolition in millennia had further buttressed this narrative. Nuisance and pollution had thus to be located elsewhere, spatially and socially, and the discourse of planning acquired its importance from its confidence in managing this separation (Sharan, 2006). Kundu (2012) interestingly mentions about the role of the state towards making of market oriented city for which elite provide capital for infrastructural development for beautification of city, and in exchange the state ensures their quality of life and interest. He argues that this is the rationale for maintaining a 'degenerated and differential periphery'.

Figure 1: Places for Relocation of Industries



Source: generated by author, based on the information collected from DSIIIC

In this background, this paper argues that the creation of certain landscapes/geographies in the city is coterminous with the emerging labouring practices in the periphery of megacity. The simplistic interconnection between economic growth and social development as perceived by the Master Plans ignores the constant and dynamic role of social relations of production which is produced and reproduced in everyday praxis. This paper attempts to examine the scenario of livelihood and work for migrants working in the industrial estate in the periphery of Delhi. It is needless to say that people belonging to rich and powerful class have more access to the spaces of the city, indeed the very objective of making it a global city is based on giving license to certain type of citizenship, and thereby excluding 'others'. An attempt has been made to address the real questions of repression of migrant labourers and their response to it as well as placing it in the context of urban planning by drawing upon the case of Narela, which is a classic example of initiative of planning by DDA since the early 1990s.

The section following this brief introduction describes the methodology of the study. The third section discusses the changing labour market in India and its impact on industrial scenario in Narela. Having discussed the background of the city and Narela Industrial Estate, the fourth section illustrates the major findings of the paper with respect to the conditions of employment in industries, the cost of living in the city for migrant workers, and network as an agency adopted by workers which is considered important in the current socio-economic regime barring the collectivisation of workers in formal organisations.

## **2. Methodology**

The research study was undertaken to look into the labouring practices of migrant labourers. Through more in-depth fieldwork it was explored that this was not just the state policies which held importance in shaping the labour market, rather the existing socio-spatial practice was also equally significant in shaping the dynamics of relationships between the various actors in urban space of Narela. As the workers in the resettled *bastis* were interviewed, encounter with another set of incoming migrant workers took place, which gave the study an interesting turning point bringing the dynamics of relationship between the locals and the migrant workers, as they mostly supported the rental and service economies of the erstwhile villages which are now either Census towns or are urban villages. Interviews with these workers gave an idea of the working condition of the workers in the industries and conditions which is leading to their fragmentation and non-collectivisation. Interviews with the industrial owners and Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (DSIIDC) officials were carried out to understand the process of industrialisation and impact of industrial relocation policy in Narela. These interviews with industrialists, who were largely from Delhi, and migrant workers revealed that Narela has

accommodated these changes in its own way owing to its existing social practice and few other physical factors. This further posed the need for interviewing the local population which was also categorised into three types, first, the locals with political influence or belonging to higher socio-economic group, second, the locals belonging to middle socio-economic group and third, the former landless agricultural labourers who have no livelihood after land acquisition. There were four actors which were involved in shaping the urban space of Narela: first, the industrialists, second, the migrant workers amongst whom one category was resettled *basti* dwellers and the other was incoming migrant workers, third, the locals and fourth was the planners and the state agents. Total 42 workers were interviewed from different spatial locations amongst which, few were from resettled *basti*, while some stayed in rented accommodation in the present urban villages or census towns and others were locals of Narela. Eight industrial workers and one DSIIDC official from Narela Relocation Cell, Head of All India Central Council of Trade Union (AICCTU) and one member of AICCTU were also interviewed. Besides, eight locals from Narela, who had been residing in the place from the past generation had also been interviewed. The sampling technique was snowball and convenience. Table 1 gives an account of the sample size of industrial workers. The sample size is kept low because the study largely draws from in-depth interviews with the help of semi-structured questionnaires and FGDs, to understand the intricacies of workers' lives and their experiences in industries.

**Table 1: Interviewed Workers and their Location**

Spatial Location	Sex	Number	Total Number
Resettled <i>basti</i>	Male	13	22
	Female	9	
Rented accommodation <sup>2</sup>	Male	13	13
Locals of Narela	Male	2	7
	Female	5	
Total			42

Source: Primary Survey, 2018

### 3. Changing Labour Market and Industrial Scenario in Narela

The changes in labour market in the post neo-liberalisation period and how this shift in the labour market has brought changes in politico-economy environment of labour becomes the first issue to be addressed when discussing about labour markets. Two major changes in labour markets, as reflected upon from the literature, are: firstly, increased demands for casual and contractual workers which can also be called as hire and fire culture, with reduced labour rights, protection and security that emerged as a major concern in the globalised labour market and secondly, annihilation of

association, unionisation and collective organisation of labour in the capitalist labour market is another concern, making livelihood hard to earn. One aspect of large scale shift from permanent to temporary nature of work was to discourage the formation of organisation of workers.

Having briefly discussed about the changing labour market in the current economic regime, it also becomes important to address the labour market and conditions at work created by the industrial estate in Narela. However, before that, it is crucial to discuss the types of industries in the industrial estate and the benefits they accrue because of the agglomeration. The industrial estate of Narela and the places nearby is state-induced for the purpose of locating manufacturing industrial activities outside the core of the city. This geographical accumulation of firms from various industries is believed to be important for regional development. Narela Industrial Estate is not a cluster because of having a wide range of products which implies no common opportunities and threat and hence there is little scope for joint action (Singh, 2010).

Narela Industrial Estate came into existence in 1988-89, while the acquisition process had started in 1978, with 612 acres of land and 3,376 industrial plots varying from 100 to 350 square meters. Out of 3,376 plots, 1,563 plots were meant for relocation. The allotment of plots through draw system started in 1992, while the relocation plots were allotted after 1996, after the Supreme Court order of 1996 wherein a ruling was made to shift hazardous and polluting industries operating in non-conforming areas to Narela, Bawana, Patparganj, Badli. The Industrial development in Narela Industrial Estate had picked up after 2000 when actual relocation of industries had started, as DDA was asked to submit a report to Supreme Court on relocated industries (Kathuria, 2001) and besides that, when a large-scale eviction of labourers from the core to periphery areas actually created a huge labour pool in Narela. Various industrialists from Delhi, Sonipat and locals from Narela had invested hugely in industrial development. The allotment of industrial plots started in 1992, while after the order of 1996, the plots meant for relocation (1,563 plots) were allotted to relocated industries. The first phase of allotment was done on the basis of lucky draw, for which various applications were received as the land price in Narela was very cheap and thus was bought by various people who were interested in investing in the industrial area speculating a rise in the land prices. The possibility of development of industries further promoted the investment in the industrial land market. The rate of industrial land in 1992 was at Rs.650 per square meter (sq. m) which rose to Rs.4,050 per sq. m in 2000 and Rs.16,000 in 2010, with current price being around Rs.25-30,000 per sq. m. This huge rise in the market rate of industrial plots in Narela itself depicts the pace at which industrial development took place after the order of relocation of industries. Therefore, it would not to be totally wrong to mention that the development of industries in Narela is a result of state intervention

which has later generated their agglomeration force. The key element in generation of these agglomeration forces are availability of cheap labour, lower transport costs and increasing rate of returns (Fujita, 2007). In the case of Narela, the availability of labour with varied skills was a major factor for initiation of firm economies. Apart from that, the agglomeration also reduces the transport costs which further affect the performance of industries.

Industries in Narela Industrial Estate are small and medium scale industries which procure and sell its product at national level. Most of the industries are of plastic goods, cable wires, footwear and food processing industries (Table 2). A list of 205 life members was given by the DSIIDC which is taken as a sample for knowing about the types of industries. Table 2 gives an idea about the types of industries from the given sample.

**Table 2: Types of Industries**

<b>Types of Industries</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Plastic Industry	72	35.0
Packaging Industry	5	2.4
Food Processing Industry	18	8.8
Engineering Industry	8	3.9
Footwear Industry	20	9.8
Metal Industry	5	2.4
Chemical and Dyes Industries	4	1.9
Steel and Marble Industry	4	1.9
Others (including cables and wires, printing, polymers etc.)	69	34.0

Source: DSIIDC, Narela

Few Food Processing industries are also set up by the erstwhile large-scale farmers who had received a considerable amount of compensation money to start a new business. These few local people from Narela had invested in setting up of a Food Processing Industry as they had familiarity with the marketing of foodgrains and besides there is an Anaj Mandi in Narela from where they can procure raw materials.

Another change which this industrial estate witnessed was the infrastructural development after PNC Ltd.<sup>3</sup> was given the onus of infrastructural development in Narela Industrial Estate on Public Private Partnership (PPP). The improvements in infrastructure of the industrial estate have led to increased ease of business for many industrialists. The workers in the industrial estate are mostly migrant workers who are staying in nearby villages on rented accommodation and migrant workers who have been forcefully sent to Narela from core of the city as a result of basti Resettlements.



Most of the industries have hierarchical organisation of workers (Figure 2), where the owner hires a supervisor/foreman for various departments or for the whole industry if it is a micro scale industry. The supervisor is responsible for quality checks, managing and executing the production system. The supervisor or the owner hires labour contractor for various departments such as sowing, shaping, cutting etc. in a footwear industry. This labour contractor further brings labourers for work and manages the labourers. Labour contractor is a middleman who charges commission for providing labourers and collectivising them for work. In most of the cases, the labour contractor has earlier worked as a labourer for some time and as he learned the work he gradually proceeded to this contract business by establishing close relationship with workers or using old relationships based on caste and regional ties in village to bring workers in city. Therefore, the industrial relationship inside an industry is not entirely work dependent and new but is rather and in many cases in conjunction with the spatial embeddedness (Herod, 2003) of the migrant workers. The workers' power repertoire in industries is essentially based on this social relationship with the labour contractor (Castree et al., 2004). The type of work and the upgradation that a worker may go through in his work life in an industry also depends on the social relationship which is based on the identity of the worker. For instance, Chhotelal, who is a labour contractor in a Footwear Industry and hires labourers for pasting rubber perforations to sole, says:

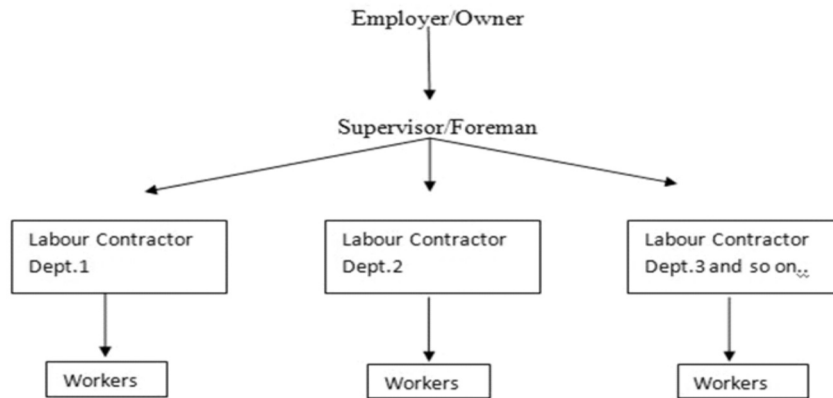
*Workers from my village or who are known to me are also upgraded from helper's position to kaarigars' (skilled worker) position, if they learn the work quickly, the pay is also increased. Further, since I feel responsible for them, I take care of them.*

This 'taking care of' further implies the importance of spatial embeddedness that a worker carries with himself even after migrating from his village to city.

The workers in the industries are recruited through labour contractors and also directly through advertising on the gates of the firms. The process of hiring is based on the trust between the employee and the employer/contractors, rather than a legal binding contract. Most of the workers are hired as helpers and are then promoted to work as *kaarigar* if they learn the work. The process of learning inside the industrial workspace is based on social relations and networking skills of the workers. However, the gendered division of labour inside the industrial workspace is strictly maintained which employs women as helpers who could only perform jobs in sewing department, as cleaners and in packaging department. The upward mobility of women as *kaarigars* has not been observed while interviewing any of the female workers in the industry.

Various micro scale industries in Narela have also come up which employ female workers at piece rate and make them work from home.



**Figure 2: Hierarchy in Industrial Firm of Narela Industrial Estate**

Source: Field Study, 2018

Large number of literature discussing the implications of gendered division of labour on industrial surplus accumulation and women's using of the agencies by working in their home spaces due to their spatial embeddedness to home can be referred to here to situate this case study in larger discourse. These industries are employing females who would prefer to work from their homes and would work at minimal wages without any security. These works are sometimes the types of work which have hazardous effects on health of workers and largely serve local markets for consumption. For instance, work of filling *chuna*<sup>4</sup> in plastic containers for tobacco consumption or pasting labels on the containers of products or sewing rucksacks. For this work particularly women workers are hired at piece rate which is as low as Rs.100 for achieving target of 1000 units. Ramvati, from Pocket 13, who was seen busy in filling *chuna* in few such bottles, complained about the bruises of her hands caused due to *chuna*. She mentioned, *we are neither provided any gloves nor given any extra money or raise, but since this work can be done from home, we do it.*

#### 4. Findings of the Study

This section is divided into three parts: the first two parts discuss the basic empirical findings about the wages and the expenditure or cost of living in the city. The first section makes the case for importance of individual agency of workers, since their organisation for assuring their job security, health benefits and social security is more or less absent in Narela Industrial Estate (NIE). The second part focuses on the cost of living in the city for migrant working class. It discusses the experience of lived spaces of workers in the city in relation to their work. Given the weak position of workers in this geography of capitalism, the third section interestingly illustrates how a worker uses his network and spatial embeddedness as a power repertoire.

#### 4.1 Conditions of Employment

Interviews with workers revealed that the hours at work and the wages for the male and female workers varied in the industrial firms. Evident wage differences between male and female workers were observed, even for the same work hours. As discussed earlier, the female workers were mostly hired as helpers for particular kind of jobs. The average wages for helper was Rs. 5000-6000 per month (pm) for females for 8-10 hours and Rs.6000-7500 pm for males for 8-10 hours and Rs.7500-9000 pm for 12 hours for male workers. None of the female workers interviewed worked for more than 10 hours. It was mostly the male workers who would work for 12 hours in a day. These wage differentials existed because male workers often perform physical work of loading and unloading of goods, while female workers were not hired for or not preferred to perform this work. Helpers were the unskilled workers who were hired by the employer or the labour contractor to work for the jobs that almost anybody could do. The workers are provided with one leave per week; however, if they prefer to work on the day of leave they would be given wages of that day as well.

**Table 3: Wages of Workers in NIE**

Wages in Narela Industrial Estate (as per the sample size of study)				Wages as recommended by Delhi Govt. (as per March 2018)	
Worker	Sex	Wages per month (in '000)	Hours of work per day (in hours)	Worker	Wages per month (in '000)
Helper	Male	6-7.5	8-10	Unskilled	10.77
		7.5-9	10-12		
	Female	5-6	8-10		
<i>Kaarigar</i>	Male	10-11	10-12	Skilled	16.08

Source: Primary Survey, 2018 and Labour Department Notification No.1/13/2017-LS-II, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

The *Kaarigars* would work for 10-12 hours a day and earn Rs.10,000-11,000 pm. All the *kaarigars* interviewed were male workers. These male workers had mostly started as helpers and had later learned the job of *Kaarigars* by expressing their interests to the employer/labour contractor. This was mostly observed in the case of male workers; however, none of the female workers interviewed was seen as moving upward in the ladder of skills. They would take up different works in the category of helpers but were largely not seen as working with machines. An interview

with a woman worker in Pocket 11 revealed that the up-gradation to position above helper for a woman is hardly the case. She states:

*We are helpers, they don't even let us sit on machines, they say do not touch the machines, it will be ruined. How will we learn? Even if we learn, we can never compete with men; employers will only keep men as kaarigars.*

This strict hierarchy of division of labour is maintained in the industrial spaces which is engendered and in conjunction to the social norms of patriarchy. The spatial embeddedness of the workers is largely seen in their daily socio-spatial praxis as well as in their daily lives such as commuting for work, maintaining relations with other workers at the place of work, networking with the labour contractors or the employers, working at the particular firm or choosing to switch or quit working.

Since the process of hiring of workers is not bounded with any legal contract and workers are mostly hired through labour contractors, there is no evident organisation or association of workers to assert their voices. There is no unionisation of workers because of the presence of large number of migrant workers amongst whom, few works come for short period of time and return to their village and then again come back to work in the industry. There is a Workers' Union run by All India Central Council of Trade Union (AICCTU), however, AICCTU has been unsuccessful in organising or unionising the workers together for demanding better working conditions and security of jobs. Therefore, individual agency becomes important in the case of industrial workers working in Narela (Gialis and Herod, 2014; Sharma and Kunduri, 2016). The social security such as health insurance, raise in wages and job security which is to be provided to the workers is neglected by the industries. Moreover, the absence of any functional institution to address the grievances of the workers is further hindering their social security, since most of them are ignorant about the legal proceedings against violation of their rights. The lack of awareness amongst the workers of their rights and norms which are supposed to exist in industries further leaves the workers vulnerable.

During the interviews carried out with workers, four cases were recorded where the workers had suffered injuries at the workplace and had not been paid any compensation for their losses. There has also been a case where death of a worker had taken place at the workplace and no responsibility was taken by the employer because the worker was hired by labour contractor. The labour union member had filed a petition in high court asking for compensation for the worker's family from the employer's side. The worker's family somehow managed to receive an amount of Rs.75,000 after almost a year. This instance further reveals the apathy of the employers regarding the workers' conditions in the industries.

The debate addressing the labour policy reform and the Indian labour regulations often proves to be most complex and restrictive in the world. The World Bank report 2008 stated that Indian Labour Regulations have constricted the growth of formal manufacturing industries where these regulations have widest application. It becomes clear from the literature that legislations and laws can be in favour of the workers as well as against them, therefore, the task of enquiry shall be to look into under what conditions each result is obtained (Basu et al., 2008). The formal manufacturing industry which often hires workers on contractual and temporary basis is under no obligation to provide basic wages and security to the workers. Moreover, as found in the interviews, even the workers who had been working in the firm for past 10-12 years have no measures of social security or benefits, apart from those procured because of informal and interpersonal relations with the employer. The wages of the workers are far below from the minimum wages prescribed by Labour Department notification,<sup>5</sup> dated 10th October, 2017, for Delhi. The minimum wage<sup>6</sup> for an industrial worker with Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA) per day is Rs.359 for unskilled worker while it is Rs.536 for skilled worker, for working above the ground. The skilled male worker working in a footwear industry in Narela Industrial Estate earns Rs.316 for 12 hours while a female worker earns Rs.216 for 8 hours, or in other terms, male workers for working 8 hours would get Rs.275 while a female worker would receive between Rs.215 to Rs.250 per day. Rates were similar in plastic and other industries. The wage mentioned here is for helpers who are largely employed by the industries in Narela. In the exercise of powers conferred by section 30 of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 (XI of 1948), the Central Government has formulated few rules keeping in mind the labour laws and regulations which state that the number of hours which shall constitute a normal working day shall not be more than 9 hours with extra wages for overtime working hours.

It is ironic to see the situation of industrial workers in small and medium scale industries in Narela, keeping in mind the seven days' strike of the industrial workers in 1988 in Delhi with impact of such magnitude that forced government to bring major revision in minimum wages in Delhi and introduce VDA within the minimum wages. As a result, Delhi had the highest minimum wage rates in the country at that point of time (Majumdar, 2002). The household income of these workers hardly account for more than Rs. 10,000 per month. Almost 64 per cent of workers interviewed stated that their household income ranged between Rs. 8,000-10,000 and the rest between Rs. 10,000-15,000. The single migrant workers mostly had an income ranging between Rs. 6000-9000 per month. Within this, the workers who stayed with families had major expenditure on food and maintenance of the household. The expenditure on schooling and health was least and incidental in the latter case. Most of the households were saving a part of their income for their daughter's marriage and other family occasions and events which held

importance in the socio-cultural context of their lifestyle. Given this, the investment on cultural advancement of the families was hard to avail. Moreover, the lack of affordable educational facilities was also an impeding factor in prohibiting this investment. Although it was not stated out rightly, but it emerged in FGD that alcoholism also entailed major investments of many households, where male members of the families would spend a major part of their income on alcohol. Single migrant workers would largely spend on renting accommodation, food and transport, where, if any money is saved, it is carried as a remittance to their homes. A major part of income also went into recreational activities for single migrant workers who had come to the city for the first time. The amount of remittances varied between Rs.2000-Rs.5000 for a period of 10 months of earning. The major dissatisfaction of workers while working in the industries was unaccountability of the work along with meagre wages which they received after working for 10-12 hours a day. Moreover, every worker is hired as a helper and later would learn work of varied types, this learning or growth would not necessarily contribute to the increase in income of the worker. This repetitive kind of work with machines would also make many workers look for better prospects and conditions of work.

This changed labour market which is witnessed in present times is a result of movement towards privatisation and liberalisation which has brought changes in economic structure and policies that are not conducive to micro and small scale industries and has a great deal of impact on the ways the workers are hired and paid in the manufacturing firms. The inclination towards the contractual forms of engagement of workers with the firm is considered beneficiary to achieve higher economic growth. The small and medium scale industries often respond to change in market fluctuations by changing the structure and composition of labour force as per market needs. The increase in productivity is brought by lowering of labour costs. In such conditions the employers have greater freedom to negotiate the terms of flexibility of labour market. This is aligned with the concept of 'market fundamentalism' put forward by Stiglitz (2002), where free operation of market forces ensures full employment of labour while trade unions or labour protective regulations are responsible for market distortions (Sharma, 2006). The industries in Narela do provide employment to a large number of people, however, this is at the cost of large scale dispossession which had taken place at various scales and therefore served a well etched path for exploitation of the labour force. Flexibility in the work regime shall not be looked under the light of the hire and fire strategy, rather it should also address the larger problem of wages, social security, working hours and health hazards of the workers while formulating appropriate labour laws and their enforcement. The cases of fire accidents taking place in the industries of Narela leave the workers injured and dead with no or least compensation offered. However, this leads to loss of capital and damage for the entrepreneur as well, yet no action is taken to prevent or compensate for

such accidents. It is also because of huge structural problem in the functioning of MSMEs, where few informal businesses (for which permission has not been taken) operate in one building and therefore it restrains the industrialist to follow building bylaws or take permission from authorities for no objection certificate (NOC). This is done to reduce production cost and maximise profit through any means. Also, firms having no informal business running in their buildings do not reach out to authority for NOC because of power structure which exists in policing system and state agencies. Small entrepreneurs who only have one firm/company in the estate, usually try to reduce any cost of maintenance or management. The entrepreneurs who have more than two firms/companies in the estate are usually the ones with networks/political power to handle the outcomes of such accidents. Lack of investment and friendly policies for MSMEs in the state was also mentioned by the entrepreneurs as one of the reasons for little attention paid to poor working conditions.

#### **4.2 Moving up the Ladder?**

The previous section discusses the conditions of employment of workers in the industries of Narela Industrial Estate. Returning to the discourse of pattern of urbanisation, where gentrification is part of various urban policies of the state and the spaces for regimenting and controlling the labour is produced in the periphery of metropolis (Dey et al., 2016), the question arises as to what is the path of development which is pursued by megacities of the country. The perspective of urban expansion as development is surely manifested in the present form of urbanisation. The ever-increasing urban development boundary with rural areas coming under the purview of urban status gives rise to a mix of community in these peripheral regions which are at the cross roads of rural as well as urban areas. There exist various viewpoints/opinions about the positive impact of industrialisation and urbanisation of this peripheral area. On the one hand, the industrialisation of this new sub-city (Narela) is seen as a positive aspect where it provided employment to the displaced migrant population and induced new stream of migrants to come in, who served as a consumer for the service and rental economy in the local area. The locals are now involved in rental or transport business or other petty business. On the other hand, the acquisition of land by the state for urban development is largely resented by farmers who had to give up their land and profession. At present, most of the farmers who had received compensation amount had to take up small and petty commodity production which is a compromise with their cultural sense of power which comes from owning the land. Therefore, other ways of asserting power through unlawful means is often reported in Narela.

The two sides of the story are evidently present in the implementation of most urban policies. However, the paper here addresses the major question of what path is this form of 'development' taking and for whom is it beneficial. The discussion of implications of urban planning policies on the working-class and marginal section of the city is addressed by various scholars such as Bhan

(2013), Bhaviskar (2003), Sundaram (2009). Therefore, here we shall reflect upon the path which this ‘development’ has to offer to the working-class population. There is no refusal of the point that industries in Narela have provided employment to displaced population of the *basti* dwellers and had also induced a new wave of migration from the distressed rural regions. However, at the same time, the policy of eviction along with the industrialisation in Narela Sub-city has also created spaces for exploitative tendencies at workplace (Verma, 2003). One of the major evidences of this is, people having no source of livelihood would resort to work in industries at the cheapest rate and under restrictive labour control measures. The large-scale migration to the city for work is based on social networks and relationships which workers have with people of their native place. The greater accessibility to housing with lesser fear of eviction is also a reason for choosing Narela over Delhi for work. The abundance of cheap rental accommodation in rural areas and census towns and in resettled *basti* serves as a lucrative factor for workers to migrate to Narela. However, though this supply of informal housing is also available in Delhi, the industrial work is also considered as accountable and legit as compared to construction work or other forms of informal work available in Delhi.<sup>7</sup> The migrant workers working in industries are paid minimal wages to reduce cost of production. These wages of workers suffice their bare survival in the city where they hardly can save any amount for remittances which is

**Table 4: Average Expenditure of Worker**

Areas	Expenditure	
	Single Migrant Worker living in Rented Accommodation	Migrant Workers living in Resettled <i>basti</i>
Housing/Rent	Rs. 500-800 (where rent of single room is Rs. 2000-2500 and they live in shared accommodation)	Rs. 2500 per <i>Kholi</i> in resettled <i>basti</i> (in the case of migrant workers living with family in rented accommodation in <i>basti</i> ). If they are allottees of the resettled scheme, then yearly expenditure on maintenance of house.
Food	Rs. 2500-3000 (no ration cards, hence no subsidised food)	Rs. 4000-5000 (for a family of four, where ration is accessed mostly through ration cards)
Recreation/Miscellaneous/Transport	Rs.1500-2000	Rs. 2000-2500
Savings (per month)	Rs. 1000 or 500 in a salary of Rs. 6000 pm or more as per salary increases	Not stated clearly; varied with number of workers in a family or salary of the worker

Source: Field Study, 2018



the actual purpose of their migration. This is evidenced from the monthly expenditure of workers in Table 4.

As shown in Table 4, the financial model of a worker's life is neither very clear nor strictly followed. Though the workers may be able to save a mere amount to send for remittances or emergency, their vulnerability makes it hard for a worker to save for any investment. This holds true especially in the case of single migrant workers. The single migrant workers are more prone to falling in the trap of health issues, addiction of alcohol or *bidi* or cigarette. This has been observed from the interviews with the workers where migrant workers admitted their erratic behaviour of expenditure in the city, as they were new to it. Ranjan (22 years old) said:

*We usually don't have any idea as to where our salary is spent? When we were new to the city, we spent more money on miscellaneous things, since we were curious. Now we are moving towards a stage where we think about savings. I had spent almost 3 years working in an industry and I had migrated at the age of 19 years. We still are unable to save much from our salaries since it's merely between Rs.6000-7000 per month.*

In the case of workers living in resettled *basti*, hardly one or two households sent money to their villages, that too infrequently. They usually managed their own households in the city. Therefore, it is important to notice that much of the earnings of the workers are spent in maintaining and surviving in the city. The flow of money and investment from urban to rural areas is very less and weak, which usually occurred occasionally in festivals, marriage or any other events or functions. However, this also varied with the cases of workers – those who had their family in village and were single main breadwinner of the family were pressurised to save more money than other workers whose family had some other source of income in village. The hardest hit was the workers who were landless labourers in rural areas.

The information about savings and expenditure of workers is presented here to show that the flow of capital is weak and negligible in the case of workers of Narela. The amounts/wages are minimum to manage life in a city. The regional connection or the trickle down of economic growth is evidently not visible in the case of industrial workers of Narela. Moreover, the vulnerability of workers with no social benefits and job security further puts worker's life at risk. The only support system which these workers have is the social ties and the networks/relationships which exist owing to their rural/regional identity or are forged in the new city and workplace.

#### **4.3 Agency in Network**

The network formed by each worker within or outside his community is responsible for different types of outcomes, based on the worker's position in the network. Guiffre (2013) in her work tries to rethink the

urban community through social network analysis where she reflects upon the nuances of ties/network a person makes in one's lifetime and may or may not find agency in these networks. It was the prerogative of individuals as to how they activate the networks to their advantage. In the case of workers in Narela Industrial Estate, the ties were mostly within the communities and therefore negotiations with the employer were through those ties. An excellent example of agency in networks is Hannerz's discussion of Tom Wolfe's 1970s essay "Mau-mauing the Flak Catchers", where the importance of broker for mau-mauing is stated because of him/her being the main tie between the two groups. A Flak catcher too is a kind of broker, since he stands at the nexus between the public and the real holders of power and channels contacts between them (Hannerz, 1980). The abundance of such Flak catchers or brokers was pervasive in industries of Narela, where the labour contractor was the one having ties with both the employer as well as workers. The labour contractors are responsible for collectivising the workers for working in an industrial firm, listening to workers' demands, and keeping them from resisting or revolting at workplace. This is done when the labour contractor is close enough to the workers and at the same time enjoys employer's faith and trust. Most of the labour contractors have been workers in their lifetime and had moved up the ladder to work as labour contractor. They have access to worker's world owing to the regional and class/caste ties. The labour contractor may arrange workers from his own village when he goes back there to visit his home, mobilising his regional network and caste ties. Else, he may also arrange labourers from the city from the daily labour market or from the network of his worker friends/relatives. Most of the labour contractors are well skilled in collectivising workers based on existing ties or making new ties and networks. Labour contractor has also the job of maintaining those ties by involving himself in the world of workers. As Rajesh, a labour contractor in Narela Industrial Estate, mentioned:

*The work of labour contractor is of manipulation. We have reached to this level by manipulating both workers and employers. We must be smart and hence we earn more money. We often have to sit with workers and offer them food or drinks to convince them for doing what we want, at the rate we want. We must be a part of their community to make them believe that we are on their side. However, our work is to get the job done at minimum rates.*

Hence, labour contractor seems like a single tie that can convince labourers for working in the interests of capitalists. This does not mean that workers do not take advantage of their relationship with the labour contractor. Instead, in few instances it was seen that workers perceived their ties with the labour contractor as an opportunity to gain some leverage at the workplace or negotiate their timings or conditions of work. These non-capitalist relationships were

essential and indispensable in maintaining a smooth run of the industries on the one hand and the survival of workers on the other.

Similarly, Lakhram (19 years old), Arvind (19 years old) and Ramdin (22 years old), who had migrated together from a village in Unnao seeking work, now live together in a rented accommodation in Borgarh and work in an industrial firm in Narela. They are connected to each other through regional ties and identity. They form a strong bond where they mention that they would prefer working together in any firm as that assures them that they are not alone and there is someone to stand with them, if needed, at the time of crisis. It was observed that these relationships are stronger when the network could be traced back to the villages and weaker when the networks were formed here in the city. However, it would not be correct to generalise that workers who had migrated solely and formed networks in the city were passive. The nature of relationship, the resources that each type of network came with, were different and therefore the individual agencies differed with it too. It becomes important to address the individual agencies and collective agencies based on networks and communities here, because there is no formal collectivisation of workers (Herod, 2003), and hence, the ways in which they negotiate with the exploitative measures of labour control in industries have now differed and are more nuanced. These networks of workers hold importance in their decision making and daily lives.

In the case of finding new work, there were three sources from which workers could avail new job, these being connection with labour contractors, through their friends, kin, community groups, and through boards of vacancy on the industrial firm.

**Table 5: Source of Job for Workers (based on sample size of the study)**

Source of Job	Male	Female	Total
Labour Contractor	10	0	10
Friends/Community	14	2	16
Boards of Vacancy	2	7	9

Source: Primary Survey, 2018

It was found that even the entire process of finding new job and availing opportunities was gendered. It was mostly women who relied on finding jobs through boards of vacancy and hence they were more adjusting to their conditions of job because they were aware of paucity of chances of finding a new job. However, male workers had varied sources of finding jobs which depended on their networks and ties. Understanding these nuances further gives us avenues to explore the industrial sociology very much depending on the cultural norms of the places from where these migrants arrive.

The reason of collectivising and mobilising migrant workers for working at the lowest wage rate is because they have weaker networking

than that of locals. With weaker ties and relationships, the networks are not often mobilised to resist the adverse conditions of work. The locals however have strong ties which are based on exchange of favour among themselves and standing together at the time of crisis. As a local woman worker named Manju (35 years old), who worked in Kundli Industrial Area stated:

*We are not hired by industries in Narela Industrial Estate, this is because they prefer migrants who work in any condition and for the least of amount. We will never give in to those conditions and we stand together if something happens.*

Similar were the narratives of other local women who were interviewed. Although they were paid similar wages in Kundli, they themselves preferred working in Kundli because of accountable work and better working conditions, as reported. They were aware of their rights and had knowledge of whom to approach if they had to register a complaint in the workplace. These were the locals who were landless agricultural labourers and were left with no livelihood option after the land acquisition in Narela and were neither provided with any compensation. They were mostly from OBC community and lived in one neighbourhood where their ties were traditional, caste based, proximity based and multiplexed. As these networks strengthened the agencies of these women workers, it also restricted them to some extent in the beginning, where their working in industries was stigmatised for the family. Even today, it was the women who had the household responsibility despite their working status. The more traditional networks which were attributed with gender segregation had strict gender roles inside the household, regardless of the working status of women.

It was found that although these networks were a strengthening point for workers, it could also be a restrictive factor especially for women. The spatially embedded values and beliefs of the communities often flowed and were exchanged through networks that these workers had built amongst themselves. Few workers maintained a close relationship with labour contractor and often remained submissive before him to ask for favours in the time of crisis such as leave, slack in time durations, advance payments, learning new skills, assurance of job when on long leave. Whereas other workers failed to establish such ties with the labour contractor, and in most of the cases these were women. Male workers had greater chances of bonding with the labour contractor owing to the gender, caste, regional and class identity, while for women workers gender played a negative role in asking for favours. The industrial sociology was based on this network in which exchange of favours, obligations of giving and receiving, social ties created in these exchanges, and the social support they engender are vital aspects of modern industrial life (Guiffre, 2013).

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## 5. Conclusion

This paper brings out the labouring practices which are constructed in the peripheral region of the metropolis. The conditions in which workers live and work manifest a continued marginalisation of working class in the city. The most affected are the migrant workers who are pushed to periphery of the city and are made to sell their labour power at cheapest rate. The working conditions in the industries are exploitative and the labour control measures are such that push labourers into dehumanising lives. In such conditions, the social network and ties, the spatial embeddedness of workers, are the most important safety net. Since the institutional and legislative framework in the state or in the industries assures no safety guard for the workers, they are mostly vulnerable to serious health hazards and accidents. The absence of functioning of social security schemes in the formal industrial units evidently shows the informality in the recruitment process and the jobs in the industries. The industrial relationships are based on social networks and spatial embeddedness of the workers and hence the industrial sociology in this peripheral region manifests the entanglements between the rural and urban. This paper makes an attempt to highlight the state of workers in this industrial region of Narela and the role of urban planning policies in such a devastating condition. The paper highlights the need for ensuring the basic rights of these workers starting from the social security schemes for accidents at workplace and health hazards to basic minimum wages. Apart from that, the paper also enunciates the importance of networks and ties in forming and restricting the agency of workers which holds importance in current socio-economic regime of fragmentation of workers.

## Notes

1. The term basti here is used for 'slum' as referred in urban policy documents.
2. The interviews at rented accommodation could only be taken for male workers, since there were very small numbers of women who were staying in rented accommodation with their families and were also going for work. There was no female single migrant staying in the rented accommodation. Similarly, amongst the local community, there were lesser number of males who would work in industries and therefore their representation in the sample size is also lower.
3. The PPP between the PNC and DSIIDC was signed in 2011, for 15 years, out of which initial two years have been earmarked as a construction period. Narela industrial estate was to be maintained and developed by PNC. It has improved the road, drainage and the other physical infrastructure for problem free and smooth operation of the industries.
4. Chuna is also called Lime powder which is used in Betel leaves and is mixed with tobacco before consuming it.
5. Rate of wages including VDA area wise per day for Delhi is as follows:  
Unskilled : Rs.359 (Rs. 10,770 per month)

Semi-skilled: Rs.448 (Rs 13,440 pm)

Skilled: Rs. 536 (Rs.16,080 pm)

Highly skilled: Rs.625 (Rs.18,750 pm)

Source: <https://www.labourlawnews.com/delhi-minimum-wages-01-10-2017-31-03-2018/>

6. There is a difference between minimum wage and the decent wage where the latter includes minimum wages +cost of cultural advancement +share of working person in productivity (bonus).
7. Interview with male migrant workers in rented accommodation.

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